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Recent Employer Assistance Development Successes, Volume 1 Issue 1

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Recent Employer Assistance Development Successes

A bulletin from the Employer Assistance Division of BES

Volume 1 Issue 1

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February 2000

Local Office News



Since April 1999, the Aroostook County Action Program Workforce Development Center, the Northern Maine Development Commission, the Maine Public Service, the University of Maine at Fort Kent, the University of Maine at Presque Isle, along with support from the Senior Corp of Retired Executives and the Small Business Development Center, have been developing programs to help Aroostook County businesses.

The workgroup developed a series of six workshops ranging from "growing your business" to "setting up a web page." The workshops, located in Fort Kent, Presque Isle and Houlton, were held over a three-month period (September through November).

A resource directory for county businesses is also being developed by the workgroup. The directory will:

- be divided into categories of services provided by local organizations;
- list agencies in the county who can serve as the local contact for programs offered by federal, state or local governments;
- list private-for-profit agencies that provide business services, i.e., banks, accountants and business counseling services.

Approximately 2500 directories will be distributed to Aroostook businesses.

The group continues to work together to brainstorm ideas and provide continuous programs and services that have real time value for Aroostook businesses.

Jim Williams

Yesterday....management was responsible for the success of the business and employees were responsible for responding to management direction.

Tomorrow....employees will be responsible for the success of the business and management will be responsible for responding to employees' needs to succeed.

Robert Beggs



Team Appointed To Tackle Work Force Related Issues Faced By Somerset Employers

Nancy Johnson, employer assistance representative of the Skowhegan CareerCenter, is chair of the **Somerset Workforce Development Team** and has been leading the team whose mission is to identify and address workforce development issues faced by Somerset County employers.

Originally appointed by the *Somerset County Overall Economic Development Program* (OEDP) to address needs identified in the county's *Economic Development Strategy* (prepared by Charles Roundy), the team is made up of employers and professional community members, including representatives from: the Maine Department of Labor, Adult Education (SAD's 13,59, 74 and SAD 54), the Somerset County Vocational Center, Kennebec Valley Technical College (KVTC), the Skowhegan Area Chamber of Commerce, Women Work & Community, Welfare to Work, Aspire, BDL, Goodwill Industries, and state, regional, and local economic developers from Pittsfield, Skowhegan, Madison, and Fairfield. Employer involvement has included representatives from Sonoco products, H.P. Fairfield and Solon Manufacturing.

The collaborative team is already seeing results. Sylvia Hudson, town manager and economic developer for Pittsfield, points out "We really need direct feedback from our employers to fully understand the issues they are facing". Both she and Lee Brandwien, executive director of the Skowhegan Area Chamber of Commerce, have agreed to sponsor a Business Visitation Program (BVP) to survey businesses in their respective towns. While individual re-

sponses remain confidential, aggregate information will offer a true and timely understanding of the issues. The surveys will result in specific action plans for each of the communities.

In addition to the needs identified by Roundy's report, pressing concerns have already been voiced by the region's businesses. Those willing to hire and train entry level workers have cited lack of basic skills, poor work ethics and a low level of worker readiness as the greatest frustration. Businesses requiring top level talent (either experienced crafts persons or skilled college graduates) feel workers are not aware of employment opportunities in their own regions and are being enticed away to other areas of the state or nation.

Many regional employers are utilizing programs and services intended to meet the skills training needs of new and incumbent workers, but recruiters for these programs are facing the same issues. Bruce Davis of KVTC expressed concern over the difficulty of recruiting trainees for the Maine Quality Center programs which provide instruction in a variety of occupational skills at no cost to the participants. As a result of the dwindling pool of available skilled workers and a keen desire for economic growth, the initial focus of the team will be placed on three chief areas of concern:

- addressing the workforce readiness and skills of the current and available labor pool;
- ensuring and preparing for a future workforce;
- enlisting and educating employers and service providers as partners for solutions

Joseph Testa, Adult Education Director for SAD's 13, 59, and 74, points out, "We can't allow our resources to get away, we must address a method for keeping our talented graduates here

Less than 5% of small businesses in the U.S. provide any training at all for their employees.
Southport Institute for Policy Analysis

MAY 18 2000

News from the Employer Assistance Division at BES

and providing the necessary skills for those who *are* staying". Testa has agreed to lead the subgroup charged with ensuring a future skilled workforce for Somerset County. His first two efforts have been to develop a survey that will identify successful school-to-work efforts currently in place in Somerset's secondary schools and educate the team on the goals of the learning results and how they align with labor demands.

Peter Lyford, community development specialist with the Kennebec Valley Council of Governments (KVCOG), reminds the team that "The issues may appear overwhelming and there are no simple answers, but if both the provider and employer community are willing to be flexible and collaborate as partners, solutions will be identified."

It is felt by the team that involvement and input from Somerset County employers is crucial to the success of this initiative. The team meets every other Tuesday at the Skowhegan Career Center on North Avenue. Those unable to attend but wishing to provide input or receive the meeting minutes can do so via an e-mail list serve. Call Nancy Johnson at 1-800-760-1572 for more information. Community members, providers and employers countywide are encouraged to volunteer to *actively participate* in any of the subgroups delegated to address these pressing workforce issues.

Ginny Carroll

Portland CC Apprenticeship Rep Retires

Jack Skillman, Apprentice Field Rep, retires after a heart-warming career of helping young people. He was a teacher, mentor, headmaster and someone who worked hard to help young

More companies are using technology to deliver training and more are planning to do so in the future. Over half of the companies responding to the AMA survey currently use CD-ROMS to deliver training and roughly four in ten companies use either the internet or company intranet to deliver some part of their training.

American Management Association

Just over one in four establishments report that they are involved in school-to-work partnerships. Larger companies and ones in health care, finance, communication and utilities were among those most likely to participate in a school-to-work partnership.

folks get the right education, job career choices and to excel in their school studies. Congratulations Jack for a job well done. Enjoy your earned retirement. Good luck - we will miss you.

CareerCenter Employer Assistance Group Helps with Downeast Business Survey



The Sunrise County Economic Council, in cooperation with the Maine Department of Labor, and the Eastport and Lubec Chambers of Commerce, is sponsoring a Business Visitation Program (BVP) in the Cobscook Bay area.

Over 50 Downeast businesses have been selected to participate. Members of the Machias and Calais Career Center's Employer Assistance Group are among the volunteers and have agreed to visit and interview 30 of the 50 businesses.

Along with the BVP survey, volunteers are conducting a local Cobscook Bay Business Survey. This survey is exploring the idea of forming a larger regional chamber of commerce from the present Eastport and Lubec Chambers.

Interviews have been taking place since November 1999 and are expected to continue until February. BVP taskforce members will meet, upon the completion of the interviews, to identify the common issues and concerns of the business community and develop strategies to address those concerns.

Dan Molinski

New England Training Currents Workplace Needs Assessment Course Being Developed

Maine's CareerCenter staff will soon be able to become certified workplace needs assessors. The course that will lead to certification is being developed under a U.S. Department of Labor In-

cumbent Worker System Building Demonstration Grant by Maine's Department of Labor, Bureau of Employment Services.

This course will provide training in using the employer assistance process tool called an Employer Services Strategy (ESS). The ESS will guide an assessor through various areas of a company to uncover needs that might be addressed. Then, it will recommend resources to address those identified needs.

Among the areas to be covered in the course are:

- Introduction to Business and Industry: Its history and evolutionary points;
- Determining Organizational Needs: How do a business' growth stage and management style respond to changes in the marketplace?
- Determining Process Needs: What do businesses need to consider when internal and external factors present challenges?
- Determining Workforce Skills Needs: What are the skills that workers need as businesses undergo changes in organization and process?
- Developing an Employer Services Strategy: How to match identified needs with resources in the community and state

Participants in the course will: hear speakers who have experienced an array of changes in their businesses and how they met the challenge of those changes; take part in experiential projects that will apply the learning from the course; and prepare an ESS for a volunteer company and analyze the findings.

The first offering of this course will be available in May 2000 and will then be presented regionally on a regular basis. Look for more details as they become available.

Gail Dyer



Please forward employer assistance news from your local office so we can share it with others. Forward information to: Lil Bickford at BES, 55 State House Station, Augusta, Maine 04333; fax: 624-6499; E-Mail: lil.bickford@state.me.us